

ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Fall 1990

Vol. 24, No. 3

EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION



A LANDMARK STUDY

ISSUES

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Effective Christian Education: A Landmark Study

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CIRCULATION POLICY—ISSUES . . . in Christian Education (ISSN0278-0216) is published three times a year by the faculty of Concordia Teachers College, Seward, Nebraska 68434. ISSUES is sent free to each church, school, district and synodical office in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Copies are also sent to high schools, colleges and universities affiliated with the Synod.

Individuals wishing personal copies may obtain them as follows: Single copy @\$2.00 each; Subscription @\$6.00; 10 or more copies mailed to the same address @\$1.20 per copy.

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Farewell...

The Editorial Committee pays tribute to Ralph L. Reinke who recently retired as President of Concordia College—Seward. Since his election in 1986, Dr. Reinke led the college in advocating excellence in Christian education and fostering the faith development of students, faculty, and staff. Ralph, your contributions to ISSUES have been many and significant!

...and Welcome

Members of the Editorial Committee welcome Orville C. Walz as President of Concordia College—Seward. After serving as President of Concordia College—Edmonton for nine years and as a faculty member of Concordia College—Seward for twelve years, Dr. Walz brings many gifts and a lifetime commitment to effective Christian education in congregations and schools at all levels. Orv, we look forward to your leadership and contributions to ISSUES!

Reflections

Jesus Christ has instructed Christians to be the salt of the earth. Few people question that the world is in dire need of help. As we live early in a new decade, it is appropriate to plan for the next ten years, especially since this decade leads into the twenty-first century.

In setting an agenda for effective Christian education for the 1990's, a major research project by Search Institute for six Protestant denominations has much to offer. *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations* attempted to discover the effectiveness of Christian education in the six church bodies.

If you, a Christian educator, are interested in answers to the following questions, this edition of *Issues in Christian Education* is one you will find stimulating:

1. What is the single most powerful means by which a congregation positively affects the maturity of the faith of its members?
2. How important to the maturity of their faith is the length of time that youth and adults are exposed to Christian education?
3. How do quantity and quality of Christian education make a difference?
4. What percent of Lutherans have difficulty accepting salvation as a gift of God's grace, as opposed to earning salvation by good works?
5. What is meant by the vertical and horizontal dimensions of faith?
6. Where do Lutherans rank in aspects of Christian living such as witnessing, daily prayer, Bible reading, and giving time to help the poor, the hungry, the sick, and those unable to help themselves?

Happy reading! You will not like many of the answers to these questions, but all of us involved in Christian education have no choice but to become aware of the challenge before us, and then take action which will enable leaders in Christian education to provide opportunities for nurturing the faith of brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

Orville C. Walz, President



Restructuring Christian Education

It seems appropriate that an institution of the Synod that has as its goal the preparation of students for fulltime ministry as teachers, DCEs and pastors would be interested in what is going on in Christian education. Therefore, the thrust of this edition of ISSUES is to examine effective Christian education for the 1990s and beyond.

Parishes express concern that members seem to lack commitment to the congregation and the Gospel. Young adults drift away, and pastors are frustrated with confirmation instruction. Why is it that we, a church body that has from its beginning made education a major thrust of its mission, have experienced these difficulties? The challenge seems to lie in our approach to, or methods of, Christian education, an education that ought to help develop one's spiritual commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and which helps engender discipleship.

As we examine Scripture, it is evident that spiritual education took place first and foremost in the home. In the Old Testament, fathers were charged with teaching their children God's law and His commandments. Paul, in his writing to Timothy, gives thanks that as a child Timothy learned the Scriptures from his grandmother and mother. Moving from an individual to a congregational basis, the Bereans were held up as those persons who searched the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul taught was true. What a great adult education program that was!

Perhaps the Berean experience holds the key for effective Christian education. Adults heavily into the Scriptures can pass on their

enthusiasm, knowledge and witness to their children and other adults. We call that modeling. In doing that, we begin to give evidence of an integrated faith. An integrated faith is one that shows a personal relationship with the Lord and a relationship with our fellow human beings. It is a faith that emphasizes both the vertical relationship to our heavenly Father and the horizontal relationship with our fellow humans. As a result, our faith becomes alive in the process. Our faith is something we live out, not merely an intellectual knowledge of God. We become disciples of Jesus Christ, and others become disciples as well, as they live out their faith in Him. That is the great commission of our Savior, to make disciples and to teach all people about Him.

To gather insight about what is occurring in parishes with respect to Christian education, the Search Institute of Minneapolis, Minnesota, has completed a study of six mainline Protestant denominations. The results of that extensive survey provide churches of those denominations and institutions (such as this college) with valuable data that identify factors important in effective Christian education.

Unfortunately, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was not one of those six Protestant denominations. Nevertheless, the information can provide insights and direction as individual congregations and denominations look to restructure Christian education programs.

Ray Huebschman
Director of Media and Assistant
Professor of Education
Concordia College—Seward

Effective Christian Education: Faith Development Considerations

For centuries, the church has described faith as fixed. The Gospel reveals the righteousness of God to the repentant sinner and also gives the faith to receive the offer so that the person becomes reconciled to God through faith in Christ.

Today, social scientists describe people as traveling through stages of development in learning ability (Piaget), morality (Kohlberg), identity (Erikson), careers (Super), and seasons (Levinson). Various faith researchers and thinkers (including Search Institute) take these developmental psychology models and relate or integrate them with Scriptural concepts and themes. Faith development became the church's catch word for the decade.

Yet, many efforts to relate or integrate faith with developmental psychology fall short by not defining *the object of faith, the elements of faith, and the goal of faith*. Here is where Scripture speaks.

Scripture defines *the object of faith* as the Gospel, the grace of God, Christ Jesus, or God who raised Jesus from the dead. These give faith its fixed character and all mean that God remits sin for the sake of Christ's vicarious atonement. Those who trust in Christ, both in the story and the outcome of His work, are the church and are saved.

Hebrews 11 defines *the elements of faith* with two words: *hypostasis* and *elegchos*. Hypostasis means that which stands under, a foundation. It is a legal term for the property ownership documents (title-deeds) in the archives. Holy Spirit-energized faith in Jesus is the title-deed of the salvation hoped for. This suggests a cognitive function of belief in certain truths about God recorded in a document. Presumably, this cognitive knowledge grows and develops, and in this sense faith grows and develops.

Elegchos stands in apposition to hypostasis and is often translated as evidence, or conviction about what is not seen. This suggests an affective function: certainty and trust in God from the heart. Trust may grow in depth of its certainty, becoming more convinced of God's love in the face of more trouble. In simple terms, we talk about faith as both head and heart with emphasis on the heart as prior and as saving faith.

Scripture defines *the goal of faith* as conformity "to the likeness of his Son" (Romans 8:29). Just as humankind was first created in God's image and likeness, so now the goal of faith is re-creation in the image and likeness of God in Christ. Here is the sinner/saint paradox. By God's grace through faith, Christians are in Christ, new creations with a fixed, alien righteousness and life. Yet Christ needs to be formed in their thoughts, values, and actions (Galatians 4:19) by renewing their minds/attitudes (Romans 12:2), and by putting off the old self and putting on the new self (Ephesians 4:23-24). These actions are process and growth in the head and the heart. May future faith researchers incorporate these Scriptural themes with their insights into how people develop.

Ray Schiefelbein
Editor, Congregational Renewal and Professional Growth Resources
Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO

Own It, Live It, Do It!

What does the Search Institute study say to you about your own faith—life, or the style of ministry of your congregation, or the focus and direction of your school?

There are many implications in this major report for all of us, at many different levels of our ministry. And, I would suggest that this study does not only tell and teach us about six denominations, but also points to ways that we as individuals can be more sensitive and aware of our own faith—life within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Five major ingredients of effective congregations surfaced in this study:

1. Climate of Warmth
2. Sense of Family
3. Uplifting Worship
4. Service Orientation
5. Life of the Mind

I would propose that these are also five major ingredients for a Lutheran school, a Lutheran home, and the life-style of an individual person of God. Let us see how they apply.

1. **Climate of Warmth.** How is the love and joy of the Lord expressed through everyday lives? How do we portray the Christ in us? How is the friendliness and forgiveness of our

Lord lived out in our relationships with the people around us?

2. **Sense of Family.** You and I need each other. No person is an island; we are all connected by the water of baptism! We need each other—in our homes, staffs, classrooms, congregations, church—body. We are family as the Lord allows us to live and work and serve together!

3. **Uplifting Worship.** I would suggest that this ingredient of an effective congregation is also a strong ingredient for our individual daily lives. The Spirit builds us up in the faith through personal and group study and devotions, through prayers and the sharing of the Word and Sacraments. Worship is life; life is worship! And I am glad!

4. **Service Orientation.** This is a strong dimension of our living out our faith and hope in the Lord. This becomes our life-style, our sense of ministry, as we care for people around us. We do not leave this to the corporate church, or to the "other" person; we own it as cared-for persons in Christ. And it only begins with a bumper sticker announcing that "Lutheran Schools Care A Lot!"

5. **Life of the Mind.** I like this one. It means that people of God "think"! We do not leave the thinking to the Bible class or school-room, but we see all of life as the arena for learning and studying. God's creation becomes the lab. We are called, not to know the answers, but to help others ask the right questions. We are seen as God's creative creatures, created by a Creator who creates in us an urgency to learn, to explore, to doubt, and to discover!

Is it appropriate to personalize such a massive, intense research project? Is it practical to make these individual connections between the study and our personal lives? You bet it is! For if such a study is not individualized, it will remain merely a large mass of data, charts, graphs, and "learnings" that pertain to everyone, and, therefore, to no one.

Blessings and joy, as we continue to live out our "effective" life of hope, forgiveness, and caring, in the name of Jesus!

Richard Bimler, Executive Director
Planning Council for Mission and Ministry
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: Biblical Perspectives

In *Dynamics of Planned Change* (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1958), Ronald Lippitt tells about the puzzlement of efficiency experts as they watched an artillery team load and fire. Their aim was to analyze all motions in order to speed up the process. What puzzled them was one motion of one of the team just as the artillery was about to fire. The artilleryman closed both hands into a tight fist, one hand above the other, arms rigid, for a number of seconds. The motion made no sense. When asked, the artillery teams had no rational explanation of the motion, but explained that they were doing it because that was the way they were trained.

Desperate, the efficiency experts consulted with retired artillery veterans. At last, one grizzled veteran, as he watched motion pictures of an artillery team in action, solved the puzzle: "Why, they're holding the horses!" he exclaimed.

Horses had not pulled the cannon for many years. But the training to keep them from bolting at the sound of the cannon went on as always, even though it no longer made sense.

The moral is clear, also, for us who want to be efficient and effective in our Christian education endeavors: We need to **think** about what we are doing. We need to **change** when necessary, but also **hold on** to those principles which make for effectiveness.

First of all (perhaps **most** of all?) we need to remind ourselves what it is we are called to do. It is bad enough to make unnecessary motions if your task is to fire a cannon. It is infinitely worse if you do a splendid job, with no wasted motion, only to discover that your real task all along was not to fire artillery, but to fly an airplane.

In this article, then, we focus primarily on what—in Biblical perspective—Christian education is. As we do so, we will inevitably also touch on some important "hows."

A Changeless Christ for a Changing World

The old cliché is true: Christ Himself is the unchanging Center of our educational ministry. And nothing less than the world, all people, is the target audience: "For God so loved the **world** that He gave His one and only Son . . ."

Indeed, the world is constantly changing. Yet in one

sense it remains the same as it was when Christ died and when our first parents were driven from their first home in Eden. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (NIV) (Romans 3:23). By nature blind (1 Corinthians 2:14), dead (Ephesians 2:1), and enemies of God (Romans 8:7), all humans need the reconciliation with God and one another which Christ has accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood" (Romans 3:23-25).

The saving act is God's, who "through Christ reconciled us to Himself. . ." But note: He "gave **us** [His church] the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). The task is not optional. We who call Christ Lord are bound to speak, to make known, to teach the message of reconciliation. "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:20-21).

The Gospel (Good News) of God's forgiving love in Jesus is thus the central concern of the church's educational life and work. As St. Paul reminds us, it is where the power is: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . ." (Romans 1:16).

And for Growing Christians

The power of the Gospel is intended, however, not only for those who, without faith in Christ, are without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12), but also for those who through faith have become part of God's family, the Church. Every Christian faces, day by day, the gruesome threesome: the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. "With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected . . ." Every Christian needs, therefore, ongoing nourishment in Christ Himself: "But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected . . ."

Moreover, newborn Christians (John 3:5,6) "long for the pure spiritual milk" (1 Peter 2:2) to grow in their faith and life with God. As members one of another in the body of Christ, we need to hear and speak to one another the Word about Christ. The goal is *maturity*, "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son

Earl Gaulke

of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:12-16).

In the words of the Denver (1969) convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: "Christian education, understood as the communication of God's edifying Word, is essential to the life of the church and is the primary process and fundamental activity of the church in mission and the basic means for church renewal."

The Objective

Here is the way the Synod's Board of Parish Education (predecessor to the present Board for Parish Services) summarized the overall goal of a Christian education program:

...that, through the Word and Spirit of God, people of all ages may know God, especially His seeking and forgiving love in Christ, may respond in faith and grow up into Christian maturity;

...and that, seeing themselves as the reconciled, redeemed children of God and individual members of Christ's body, the church, they may live happily in peace with God, themselves, and their fellow human beings;

...and that they may express their joy in worship of God and in loving service to others;

...and that in the love of God they may value all of God's creative work in His world and church and witness openly to Christ as the Savior of all people, participating actively in God's mission to the church and the world;

...and that they live in the Christian hope.

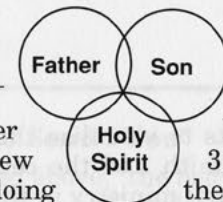
Growing in Relationships

Note that the objective may be organized in terms of *relationships* between and among:

- God
- the individual
- fellow-believers (the Church)
- non-Christians
- the creature world (created order)

Relationships are at the heart of God's design of the universe. And of us. And of His redemption of the universe. And of our life with Him.

Indeed, it is the unique nature of our Christian faith that we worship the *one* true God—the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three persons, in one and in relationship to one another. That is what the familiar three-in-one symbol of the Trinity tries to visualize.



The Father loves and delights in His Son (Matthew 3:17). The Son loves and delights in doing the will of the Father (John 4:34). The Son sends the Spirit "from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father" (John 15:26).

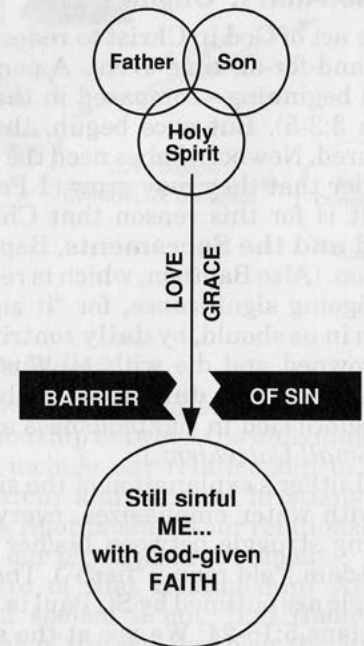
My God and I

Relationships, in the Godhead, described by that big relationship word: **love**. A love that reaches out to me, to re-establish the relationship broken by sin: "God [that is, the Father] so **loved** the world [that includes **me!**], that He gave His one and only Son . . ." (John 3:16).

"God shows His **love** for us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Another Scriptural term for the special kind of love God has for undeserving humans is **grace**: "There is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified *by His grace, as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 3:22-24).

In the cross of Christ, God's grace breaks through the barrier we erected by our sin. "Through our Lord Jesus Christ. . . we have now received our reconciliation," re-established fellowship with Him (Romans 5:11).

And that, of course, is where the next big relationship word, **faith**, enters in. For through **faith** we lay hold of God's love and forgiveness. In faith, worked by God's Spirit (Jeremiah 31:18; 1 Corinthians 12:3) through the Gospel (1 Corinthians 4:15), the Good News of God's forgiveness in Christ, we place our hand into the loving hands of our rescuing Father. "God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, *that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). In faith, I trust God's Word of promise and cling to Him for forgiveness and life:





The diagram attempts to visualize the central doctrine of our Christian faith and the central doctrine underlying all educational ministry in the church. "By this doctrine of **justification** [that God forgives us freely, by His grace in Christ, through faith]," writes Luther, "the church stands or falls." It is the chief—the fundamental—doctrine of Christianity. "In my heart there reigns, and shall ever reign, this one article, namely, that faith in my dear Lord Jesus Christ, which is the sole beginning, middle, and end of all spiritual and godly thoughts which I might have at any one time, day or night."

Luther's words echo the confession of Paul: ". . . not having a righteousness of my own, based on Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know Him. . ." (Philippians 3:9-10).

Being a Christian **means** that I stake my life, define my being, in terms of God's love and forgiveness for **me**, whom He chose "before the creation of the world . . ." and adopted as His child "through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Similarly, Christian instruction and a Christian curriculum **mean** that we center our instruction and our living together in the classroom on the message of God's forgiving love in Christ. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the **power** of God for salvation to **every-one** who has faith" (Romans 1:16).

The diagram attempts to picture it: God's love—Christ—Gospel—is central. Our teaching must be Christ-centered to build the relationship of faith and life with God. "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

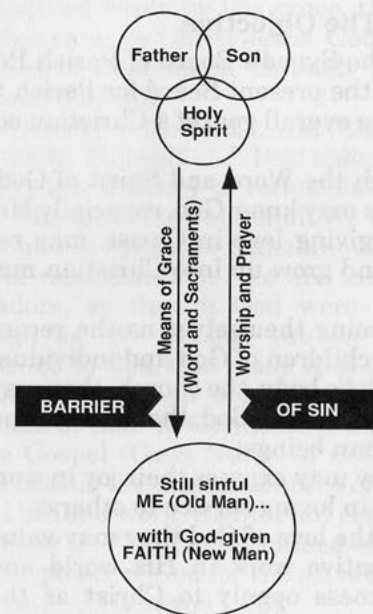
My God and I: Ongoing Life

The act of God in Christ to redeem humankind was a once-and-for-all-time event. A person's faith in Christ has a beginning—compared in the Scriptures to birth (John 3:3-5). But once begun, that faith needs to be nurtured. Newborn babes need the "pure spiritual milk" in order that they may grow (1 Peter 2:3) in faith and life. It is for this reason that Christians feed on the **Word and the Sacraments**, Baptism and Holy Communion. (Also Baptism, which is received only once, has an ongoing significance, for "it signifies that the Old Adam in us should, by **daily** contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man **daily** come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever"—*The Small Catechism*.)

As Luther's explanation of the significance of baptizing with water emphasizes, every Christian faces an ongoing struggle between his/her "new man" and the Old Adam ("old man," "flesh"). The dimensions of that struggle are outlined by St. Paul in Romans 7:13-24 and Galatians 5:16-24: We are at the same time "perfectly

righteous" (because of Jesus' forgiveness) and yet sinners still; we are not "already perfect" but people who "press on." The implications of that struggle are profound for Christian teaching. For example, any teaching which beseeches the learner to "be good"—without first surfacing the learner's sin in order to drive the learner to rely on God's Gospel power—is doomed to lead the learner to despair or to self-righteousness.

Thus, we lovingly confront sin in one another. We do not excuse sin; indeed we let the **law** do its proper work to expose sin (Romans 3:20; 7:7), to make sin "more sinful," in order that we might be driven again and again to cling to the forgiveness we have in Christ. Because we have not "already been made perfect" we feed on God's **Word and Sacraments**, God's ongoing nurturing of the new life in Christ. And we respond to God in **worship and prayer**.



"Members One of Another"

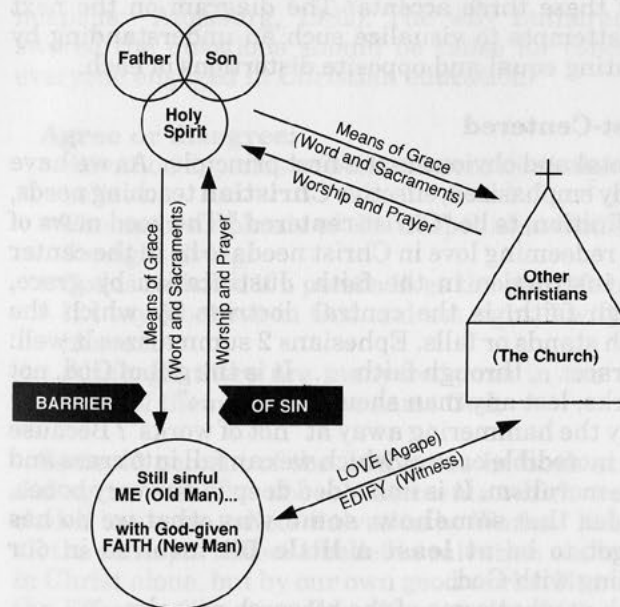
1 John 1:13 accents the second relationship integral to our Christian faith—fellowship with one another. That is an accent we may miss in that often-quoted text in Ephesians: ". . . until we **all** attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love."

God not only saved **me**; but in saving me He calls me into a relationship with others—His church, the "body of Christ." Being saved **means** that I belong to His body; means that we fellow-members of that body "upbuild one another in love." As Jesus told Peter, "When you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32).

Note the distinctive accent, which separates Christianity from the *self-fulfillment* or *self-development* of humanist psychologies on the one hand, and the "redeem *society*" emphasis of modern-day social reconstructionists. The goal is not to "save society" through new social orders, nor to improve the individual through powers that are within. Rather, from *outside*—from God—people infected with original sin are rescued from a society, the "world," which is in "the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Thus rescued, the individual Christian as a functioning member of a redeemed society, the church, serves as a leaven in the world.

Fellow Christians edify or build each other up as they **love** one another and as they hear and speak God's Word to one another. Note that twin accent in 1 Corinthians 13, the inspired description of Christian **love** in action, followed by chapter 14's description of *speaking the Word* to the brother and sister in Christ. "I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Corinthians 14:18). Or Colossians: "And above all these put on love . . . Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom . . ." (Colossians 3:14-16).

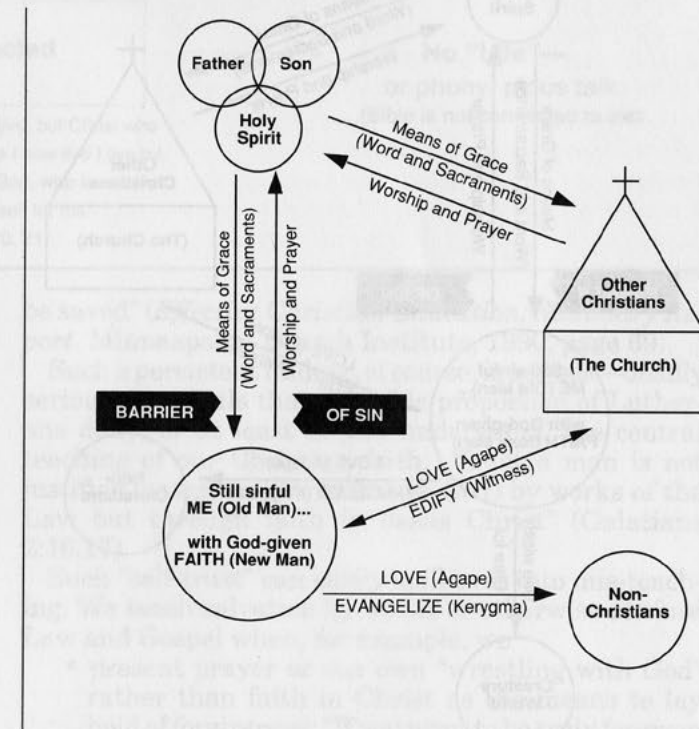
Christian education, therefore, is a matter of living the faith through loving and forgiving in the Christian classroom; including activities not only for learning the data of the faith and reciting it to the teacher, but also for speaking the Word to one another in meaningful life situations. The goal is to build a warm and supportive community in which fellow Christians may be encouraged even to "confess your faults to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16).



"... Even So Send I You"

As indicated above, "the body of Christ" (the Church) functions in this world as did its Lord during the years of His earthly ministry. Christ's people are called into a relationship also with those who are still separated from Him. "As the Father has sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18).

Effective Christian education takes seriously the Great Commission of our Lord, providing not only specific units on evangelism, but also accenting in every lesson the good and gracious will of God to save all people through the Gospel message spoken by His people (2 Corinthians 5:20,21). The lessons deal with both aspects of our relationship to others: our call to love people with God's own kind of self-sacrificing love (*agape*) and to speak to them the message (*kerygma*) of God's forgiving love in Christ. Both are necessary, for when spoken without love the message sounds insincere; and love without the message is incomplete and ineffectual. (God's Holy Spirit does His work of conversion through the *means* of grace—Word and sacraments.)



This is My Father's World

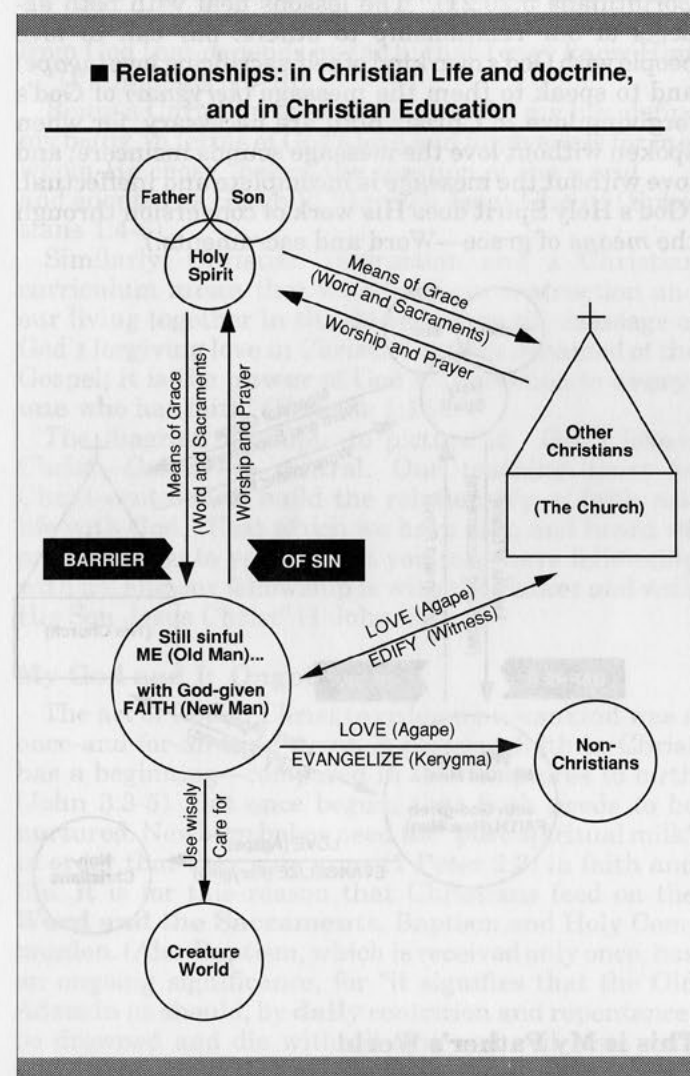
The relationships with which Christianity deals start with the **basic** relationship between the individual and God and expand to include our relationship to other Christians (the Church) and to non-Christians. The fourth and remaining relationship is our relationship to God's created order, our physical environment.

What is the nature of that relationship? Already before the Fall, God spelled it out: "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of

the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26).

As God's redeemed people we continue to be responsible stewards of God's creation. We "believe that God has made me and all creatures . . .; that He has given me . . . clothing and shoes, meat and drink, . . . and all my goods. . . ." Part of our duty to "thank and praise, to serve and obey Him" is that we use His gifts wisely, dedicating to His service the time, the talents, and the treasures He gives us. We care for and thus take care of His creation.

With this relationship, our diagram is complete:



Seven Focuses

To summarize: After stating the comprehensive objective of Christian education we have attempted to visualize (in the above diagram) and further to spell out that objective in terms of the **relationships** involved in Christian life and doctrine and education.

Another way to conceptualize any distinctively Christian program of education and/or curriculum is in terms of the **major focuses** or themes which are present and recur on every grade or department level. They may be used as a convenient yardstick to measure the adequacy of any overall Christian education program or any set of curricular materials. The seven themes are:

- Sin and Salvation
- God's Love and Care
- Word and Sacraments
- Worship and Prayer
- God's Family on Earth
- Loving and Helping Others
- Taking Care of God's World

The seven focuses are, of course, simply a list of the major themes that are inherent in the relationships diagram.

What is Distinctive in a Lutheran/Biblical Approach?

Check out the description in just about any catalog advertising religion curriculum materials. Chances are you will see the curriculum described in terms of those three magic phrases: *Christ-centered; Bible-based; life-related*. These are, indeed, summary descriptions that most Christian educators, regardless of denomination, find desirable.

What is a distinctively Lutheran/Biblical understanding of these three accents? The diagram on the next page attempts to visualize such an understanding by indicating equal and opposite distortions of each.

Christ-Centered

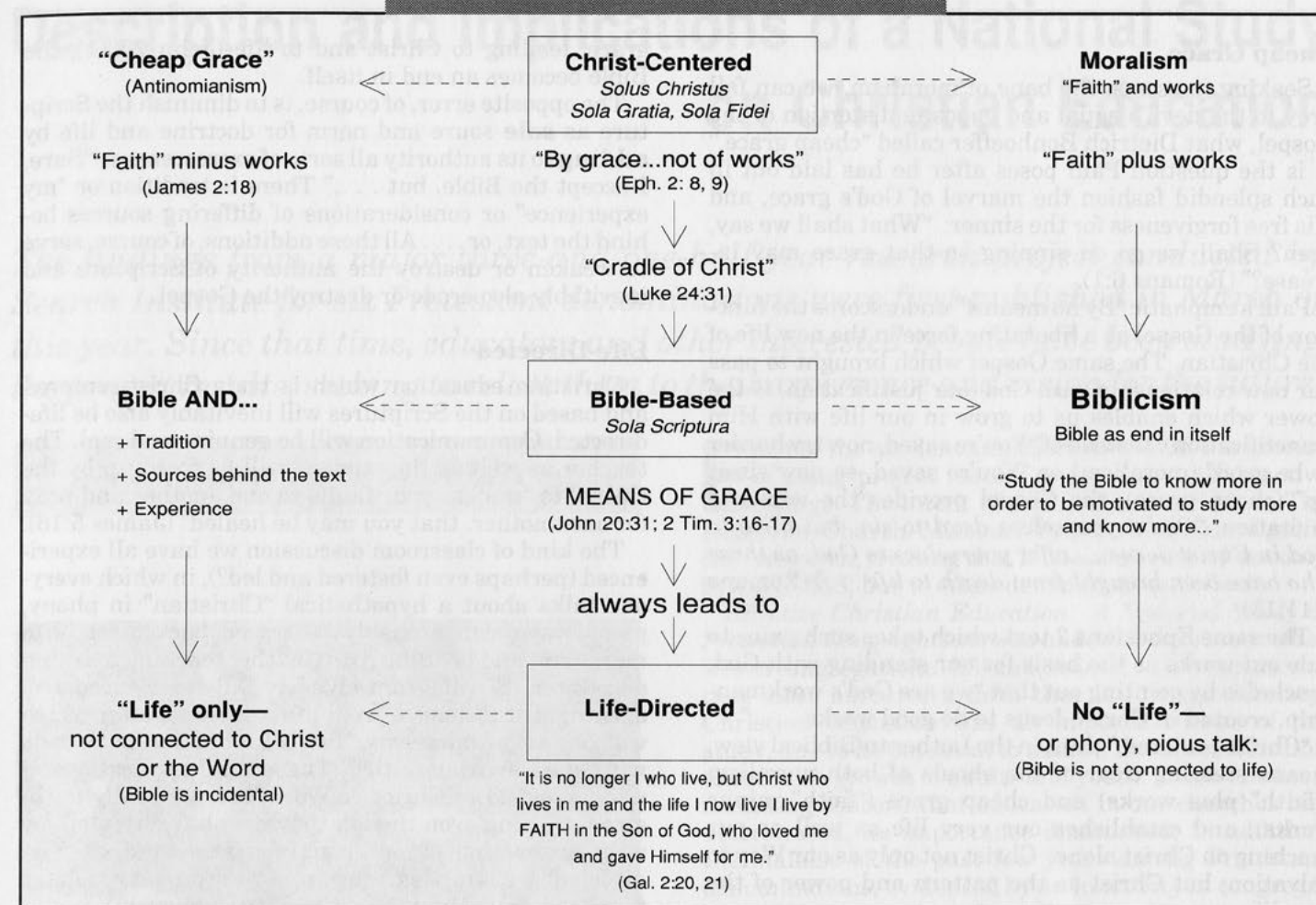
Pivotal and obvious is the first principle: As we have already emphasized, effective **Christian** teaching needs, by definition, to be "Christ-centered." The good news of God's redeeming love in Christ needs to be in the center of all instruction in the faith. Justification by grace, through faith, is the central doctrine by which the church stands or falls. Ephesians 2 summarizes it well: "By grace . . . through faith . . . It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. . . ."

Why the hammering away at "not of works"? Because of the incredible ease at which we can fall into crass and subtle moralism. It is imbedded deep in our very bones, this idea that **somehow, some way** what we do has still got to be **at least a little bit** involved in our standing with God.

Look at what some of the research reveals:

A Study of Generations (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972) reported on a comprehensive two-year study of 5,000 Lutherans. In 1981, Scale 15 of the *Generations* study

Christ-Centered • Bible-Based • Life-Directed



was again answered by a representative sample of Lutherans in a new study (*Profiles of Lutherans*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982). The way Lutherans answered the questions should be cause for concern to everyone engaged in Christian education.

Agree or disagree:

- Salvation depends on being sincere in whatever you believe.
- The main emphasis of the Gospel is on God's rules for right living.
- God is satisfied if a person lives the best life he can.
- If I say I believe in God and act right, I will get to heaven.
- Although there are many religions in the world, most of them lead to the same God.

Some 40 percent of the Lutherans in both studies *did* agree with the above statements which were included in a scale called "Salvation by Works." Note that all the concepts reflect a belief in salvation not by faith in Christ alone, but by our own good works. Now comes the *Effective Christian Education* study which reports that 67 percent of "mainline Christian" adults (including ELCA Lutherans) affirm the statement: "I believe I must obey God's rules and commandments in order to

be saved" (*Effective Christian Education: Summary Report*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1990, page 69).

Such a persistent finding, of course, is serious—deadly serious. It reveals that a sizable proportion of Lutherans deny, or at least do not understand, the central teaching of our Christian faith: "That a man is not justified (*saved; made right with God*) by works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 2:16,17).

Such "self-trust" can easily spill over into mis-teaching. We teach salvation by works or otherwise confuse Law and Gospel when, for example, we

- present prayer or our own "wrestling with God" rather than faith in Christ as the means to lay hold of forgiveness: "If you want to be truly forgiven for that sin, pray hard for God's forgiveness." (See Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, Thesis 9)
- turn the Gospel into a preaching of repentance: "After all that Jesus did for you, you ought to be ashamed to act like that!" (Walther, Thesis 15)
- try by means of the commands of the Law rather than by the admonitions of the Gospel, to urge the regenerate to do good: "You've just got to try harder to obey the teacher." (Thesis 23)

Cheap Grace

Seeking to escape the bane of moralism, we can fall prey to the devil's equal and opposite distortion of the Gospel, what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace." It is the question Paul poses after he has laid out in such splendid fashion the marvel of God's grace, and His free forgiveness for the sinner: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (Romans 6:1).

Paul's emphatic "By no means!" underscores the function of the Gospel as a liberating force in the new life of the Christian. The same Gospel which brought to pass our new relationship with God (our justification) is the power which enables us to grow in our life with Him (sanctification). Instead of "You're saved, now try harder to be good" (moralism) or "You're saved, so now sin it up" (cheap grace), the Gospel provides the winsome invitation: "Count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus . . . offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life . . ." (Romans 6:11,13).

The same Ephesians 2 text which takes such pains to rule out works as the basis for our standing with God, concludes by pointing out that "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works . . ."

"Christ-centered," thus, in the Lutheran/Biblical view, means steering clear of the shoals of both moralism ("faith" plus works) and cheap grace ("faith" minus works), and establishes our very life as well as our teaching on Christ alone: Christ not only as our Way to salvation; but Christ as the pattern and power of the new life.

Bible-Based

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31; see also Luke 24:31). Christ is the center of Scripture. The Scriptures portray Christ and also serve as the blueprint and guide for the life in Christ. They "are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

As Lutheran Christians we affirm what the Bible says about itself, that it is not an end in itself, but a **means** of grace, pointing us to Christ and the new life in Him.

Yet, it is so easy to fall into the pit of making the Bible an end in itself. If the **only** concern is for the learning of Bible **facts** ("Recite the names of the 12 disciples." "What time did Jesus die on Good Friday?") without going beyond the facts to Bible meanings ("What does it mean to **be** a disciple?" "When Jesus died, it was for **your** sake . . .") the result is Biblicism, knowledge simply for the sake of knowledge. Instead of a **means** of

grace, leading to Christ and to life (John 20:31), the Bible becomes an end in itself.

The opposite error, of course, is to diminish the Scripture as **sole** source and norm for doctrine and life by **adding** to its authority all sorts of excrescences: "Sure, I accept the Bible, but . . ." There is tradition or "my experience" or considerations of differing sources behind the text, or . . . All these additions, of course, serve to weaken or destroy the authority of Scripture and inevitably also erode or destroy the Gospel.

Life-Directed

Christian education which is truly Christ-centered and based on the Scriptures will inevitably also be life-directed. Communication will be genuine and real. The teacher as well as the student will be freed up by the Gospel to "confess your faults to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16).

The kind of classroom discussion we have all experienced (perhaps even fostered and led?), in which everyone talks about a hypothetical "Christian" in phony, pious ways, can probably be traced back directly to moralism and/or Biblicism in the teaching/learning encounter. (See diagram.) We have all experienced, too, exciting discussions of "real life" concerns, after which we have asked ourselves, "But what did that have to do with our Christian faith?" These "life" applications, if not connected to Christ or Word, are not really faith-strengthening even though they may have been otherwise interesting or entertaining. This kind of "life-directed" teaching/learning encounter probably relates to "cheap grace" and "Bible **and**" (see diagram).

Effective Christian education, centered in Christ Himself, includes Bible content which is not simply sterile knowledge to be learned as an end in itself. Nor does it function as a mere reference in an arbitrary treatment of some social or moral problem and experience. Rather, Bible content is directed purposefully toward its desired outcome in the life of the learner.

Education can be **effective** (interesting, exciting, fostering "spiritual maturity") without being **Christian**.

Education can be **Christian** (full of Bible content, yet deadening to the spirit) without being **effective**.

Lord, give us Your Spirit for effective Christian education.

Parts of this article are adapted from the Board for Parish Services bulletin: *Principles of Christian Education for the Local Parish.*



Description and Implications of a National Study on Christian Education

The findings from a major three-and-one-half-year research project conducted by Search Institute for six Protestant denominations were first published in March of this year. Since that time, educators and other interested people have been studying the project results, seeking to relate them to their experience and vision for the future.

Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Eklin



Each of the six denominations is now in the process of using project results to introduce constructive change. The intent of this article is to inform The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod about this significant research, trusting that it has applicability not only to the LCMS, but to other denominations as well.

Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations was undertaken to learn what it is in congregational life and, indeed, in life experience that most nurtures a faith that is life-transforming. Christian education was an important focus of the study, due to its potential to make a major contribution to the faith growth of adults and youth. There has been mounting concern that education in our churches has deteriorated, its importance diminished. In addition, the malaise of the past few years among Protestant denominations, evidenced by an inactivity in congregational life, an exodus of members, and a lessening of denominational and congregational loyalty, called for a new exploration of causative factors and new consideration of the role of Christian education in the mission of a congregation.

So it was that six denominations—Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Southern Baptist Convention, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church—joined with Search Institute to study these issues. All of these denominations, except the Southern Baptist Convention, are often called "main-line" denominations. Funding for the project was provided by the Lilly Endowment, Inc., and the participating denominations.

After extensive work on a conceptual design for the study, 150 congregations within each of the six denominations were randomly selected to participate. Sampling was stratified by size of congregation (under 200, 200–499, 500–599, 1,000 and larger) to ensure representative distribution on this key factor. Within each congregation, in-depth surveys were administered to

Dr. Peter L. Benson is President, and Carolyn H. Eklin, Director of Survey Services, at Search Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

random samples of adults, adolescents in grades 7–12, and teachers, and to the senior pastor and the head of Christian education. More than 11,000 individuals in 561 congregations were involved in the survey phase of the study. They provided information on faith, loyalty, religious biography, congregational life, and the dynamics of Christian education programming. To enrich this information, teams of trained observers visited 52 congregations, judged to have strengths in nurturing faith. Their written stories about these congregations add considerable insight to the survey data.

Findings on Faith Maturity

A major premise of the study is this: Congregations should be about the business of nurturing the faith of their people. If, then, a life-transforming faith is a primary goal of congregational life, we need to understand better what the elements of such a faith are. The study suggests that faith with depth and vitality has eight dimensions. These dimensions are not specific beliefs but rather indicators of a mature faith. A person with these attributes. . .

- Trusts in God's saving grace and believes firmly in the humanity and divinity of Jesus
- Experiences a sense of personal well-being, security, and peace
- Integrates faith and life, seeing work, family, social relationships, and political choices as part of one's religious life
- Seeks spiritual growth through study, reflection, prayer, and discussion with others
- Seeks to be a part of a community of believers in which people give witness to their faith and support and nourish one another
- Holds life-affirming values, including commitment to racial and gender equality, affirmation of cultural and religious diversity, and a personal sense of responsibility for the welfare of others
- Advocates social and global change to bring about greater social justice
- Serves humanity, consistently and passionately, through acts of love and justice

In consultation with scholars, denominational executives, and clergy we developed 38 statements that represent facets of the eight dimensions. These statements, then, are the basis of the study findings on the nature and vitality of faith among adults and adolescents. Results reported in this article are for the five mainline denominations combined and are weighted to reflect denominational size.

Via analysis, the 38 faith statements organize themselves into two major themes. The first we might call a vertical theme—a deep personal relationship to a loving God. The second, the horizontal theme, is a consistent devotion to serving others. Each person in the study was placed in one of four faith categories, based on his or her pattern of response to these themes.

We learned that only a minority of Protestant adults

evidence the vibrant and life-encompassing faith that congregations seek to develop. Among mainline adults, only 32 percent evidence a faith in which both vertical and horizontal themes are strong and visible (this is called integrated faith and represents the higher range of faith maturity). Thirty-six percent of the adults have an undeveloped faith, with both the vertical and horizontal themes relatively dormant. The remaining 32 percent are high on one of the two themes and low on the other. Among adolescents, 63 percent fall into the undeveloped faith category, with 11 percent having attained an integrated faith.

We learned, too, that faith maturity is strongly linked to age, increasing with each successive decade; it is, in fact, most likely to be found among those over 70. By and large, women exhibit greater faith maturity than men. These patterns are shown below.

Total	32%
20–29	16
30–39	21
40–49	30
50–59	30
60–69	37
70 or older	57
Men	21
Women	38

The percentage of adults varies some by denomination. These variations could be real differences, or they could be due, in part, to the quality of the congregational samples in each denomination or cultural or ethnic differences within denominations. What seems to be most important, however, is the similarity among the denominations rather than the differences. As the numbers below indicate, the percentages of adults evidencing an integrated faith range from 24 percent to 34 percent, which is a rather restricted range. The point is that within each denomination only a minority have moved to an integrated faith.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	34%
United Methodist Church	34
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	31
United Church of Christ	29
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	24

Some faith expressions seem more problematic than others. In the vertical theme, for example, only 43 percent of adults practice daily prayer, and 34 percent read the Bible once a week or more. Most adults have difficulty accepting grace as a gift rather than something earned, and half say they rarely or never talk about their faith with others. In the horizontal theme, about half (52%) of adults report they **never** volunteer time to help the poor, hungry, or needy; and only 2 out of 10 adults make an effort to promote social change, social justice, or peace. Percentages on these faith indicators for youth are similar to the adult findings.

Although most adults affirm basic theological tenets about the truth of Scripture, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and God's transcendence and immanence, nevertheless these affirmations do not seem to translate into the kinds of devotional, relational, or witnessing actions that characterize the person of mature faith. In other words, there is evidence of great reserve in connecting one's faith to human relationships—to family, to the world of work or school, to world events, to politics. And there is reluctance to talk about faith with others. Faith is quiet, hidden, stifled, lacking the vibrancy of a life-encompassing faith.

The lethargy in faith also explains why many people keep their congregation at arm's length: Only 32 percent of adults are involved in Christian education programs, only 31 percent want their church to make better use of their skills and talents, and only 21 percent want more opportunity to be a leader in the church.

The hopeful news is that most adults and youth want to grow in faith. The majority report strong interest in developing a deeper relationship to God, a more significant encounter with Jesus, and a fuller understanding of Scripture. Ninety-two percent say they have clearly felt the presence of God in their own lives. What, then, can congregations do to promote a life-transforming faith?

The Nurture of Faith Maturity

In examining the **religious biographies** of adolescents ages 13–18, the two most distinctive characteristics of youth with more integrated faith are a high degree of family religiousness (that is, family prayer, family service projects, and the experience of talking to mother and father about faith), and frequent involvement in Christian education.

In this same area—religious biography—we learned that the greater the lifetime exposure to Christian education, the greater the faith maturity of adults.

The study also identified six factors in **congregational life** that contribute most to the faith maturity of adolescents and adults. Our site visits to 52 congregations confirmed and enriched these understandings. As an important bonus, these six promote not only faith maturity but also personal loyalty to both one's congregation and one's denomination. The six are:

1. A climate of challenge. In effective congregations, members think, discuss, debate, and even argue about the "stuff" of faith, including values, theological issues, politics, and Scripture. An active intellectual engagement draws people out, allows them to hear and see how others experience the faith, and lets them tell their own faith stories. In this climate, people grow.

2. A climate of warmth. Effective congregations feel warm, friendly, and welcoming. Strangers are easily integrated, people know each other by name, and social cliques are minimal. Informal expressions of warmth are cross-generational—old to young, young to old, child to adult, adult to child. In less effective congregations, relationships are more segregated according to age.

3. The experience of receiving care. In effective congregations, people have a personal experience of receiving care. They reach out to one another in times of need. There is something theologically powerful about such care—the love of God experienced directly, personally, dramatically.

4. Worship. In effective congregations, worship is engaging and uplifting. It has the kind of variety, flow, and involvement that moves one emotionally and intellectually. It helps to give meaning and direction to life.

5. Service. Opportunities for serving others—whether in the congregation, local area, or global community—are available. There is a commitment to service not only because it is educationally rich, but because, as people of faith, we are called to serve.

6. Education. Adults, youth, and children participate in well-designed Christian education programs. The quantity is not as important as the quality and vitality of these educational efforts.

Of all six factors, the last—effective Christian education—matters the most in deepening the faith of adults and youth.

This research finding is powerful. It makes urgent the revitalization of Christian education within congregations that have failed to develop this vital area of congregational life. It is important to note here that Christian education spans a variety of formal activities. The definition from the study includes Sunday school, church school, Bible studies, confirmation, camping, retreats, workshops, youth ministry and youth groups, children and adult choirs, auxiliaries for men and women, prayer groups, religious plays and dramas, Vacation Bible School, new member classes, and inter-generational or family events and programs.

What, then, are the characteristics of quality Christian education?

The research findings highlight the following:

- the pastor is actively involved in the program as a teacher, mentor, and guide, having received formal training in Christian education, either in seminary or in continuing education
- teachers are knowledgeable about the dynamics of teaching and learning; emphasis is placed on their training and support

- the program actively engages participants in reflection, action, and conversation; it coordinates themes across age groups, so that children, adolescents, and adults are engaged in the same issue and concepts at the same time
- program content includes not only basic theological concepts and biblical understandings but also opportunities for participants to learn from life experience, using it as an occasion for spiritual discovery. Additionally, the program strives to connect faith to real-life issues. For adolescents, these issues include alcohol and other drugs, sexuality, and friendship. For adults, they include issues of values, ethics, national policy, and global events.

Some congregations—and they can be urban or rural, small or large—do outstanding work in deepening the faith of their people. But all congregations can strengthen their impact on faith. Looking again at the six effectiveness factors, we note discrepancies between what exists in congregations and what needs to be in place for promoting growth toward faith maturity.

In the area of climate, only 46 percent of adults and 42 percent of youth say their church challenges their thinking. Only 32 percent of youth feel that adults at their church care about them. In the area of worship, less than one-third of adults rate as excellent the degree to which their congregation's worship services are 'spiritually uplifting.' But it is in the area of Christian education that reform is most needed, both because its influence on faith growth is greatest and because most members are not involved in formal Christian education. In the mainline denominations, only 35 percent of high school youth and 28 percent of adults are active in Christian education. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the numbers are 32 percent (high school) and 23 percent (adults).

Planning for constructive change requires both staff and lay involvement, with a premium on listening, shared decision-making, and resolve. We list here twelve practical suggestions for change.

- 1) Collect local information. Developing an in-depth portrait of congregational life is an important first step in determining the needs, interests, and concerns of parishioners.
- 2) Build relationship skills. These skills need honing so that people can better express warmth and care.
- 3) Promote a thinking climate. Such a climate helps to stretch and expand our comprehension of things spiritual.
- 4) Promote global awareness and understanding. We have questions about how to be responsible and responsive to living in a global society.
- 5) Promote intergenerational contact. For example, connecting older adults, whose faith tends to be more integrated, to our youth makes sense.
- 6) Coordinate themes across age groups. If all ages

are dealing with the same issues, it provides a context for dialogue.

- 7) Emphasize parent education. Quality Christian education at home helps ensure our next generation's faith maturity.
- 8) Nurture, support, and train teachers. Teachers need our affirmation and respect; they need training in the skills that will promote learning.
- 9) Promote the horizontal dimensions of faith. Involvement in service moves us to living out our faith in interaction with the world.
- 10) Expect educational involvement. A climate where people are expected to learn can undergird all Christian education efforts.
- 11) Encourage pastor involvement and training in Christian education. We need to support pastors, encouraging their increased involvement and training.
- 12) Affirm and appreciate diversity. People are at different places in their faith journey. We grow by being in dialogue.

The health and vitality of Protestant congregations is on the line. Unless we face the issues uncovered in this research, many congregations risk continued member disinterest and inactivity, member drop-out, or member switching to more effective congregations. Congregations that nurture a life-encompassing faith reap the benefit of lay involvement, membership growth, and congregational loyalty. Mature faith is contagious. The prospect of people with that kind of integrated and balanced faith all responding to the mission of the church encourages our efforts to revitalize congregational life.

Although The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was not one of the denominations involved in the *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*, the findings may nevertheless reflect, in part, its reality in these areas. It may be helpful to engage in discussion on the implications of the research for the LCMS. In the feasibility study that precluded the project, we learned from leading mainline Protestant church educators of their deep concern about the disinterest by adults in adult educational programs, the failure to maintain the involvement of youth after eighth grade, the increasing difficulty of finding and keeping volunteer teachers, the apparent disinterest of clergy in education, the inability to draw parents into the educational process, and the failure of current programs and educational methods to address the changing needs and interests of adults, adolescents, and children. To some extent, these concerns about Christian education are present today in all denominations due to societal changes that are difficult to address.

There is a power, however, in replicating the study

Continued on page 24



“EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION”

What Can We Learn?

A study of *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations* (ECE) by pastors, teachers, DCE's, boards of Christian education, church councils, those involved in special ministries such as aging, campus ministry, and church camping, district and Synod leaders, church college and university administrators and faculty, and seminary personnel of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod can result in a multitude of insights, questions, study topics, research projects, and educational plans. ECE may be the most significant research project investigating congregational life in recent years.

Since the sample did not include members of the LCMS, citing implications for congregations of this Synod needs to be done with care. However, support for members of the Synod to consider possible applications of ECE is provided by previous studies which found more similarities than differences between members of the LCMS and other Lutheran bodies.¹ Our purpose is to highlight possible contributions of this research project to the educational ministries of the church, giving particular attention to the aim of teaching, the power of Christian education, and an educational agenda for congregations.

The Aim of Teaching

Though the aim of congregational life and teaching can be conceptualized in different ways, the premise of the study, that the primary aim of congregational life is to nurture the faith of youth and adults, is affirmed by both Biblical and theological perspectives. Paul, in each epistle, directed attention to the role of faith. On several occasions, he gave thanks for faith which was growing more and more (Colossians 1:4; II Thessalonians 1:3). He sent Timothy to Thessalonica for the purpose of strengthening and encouraging faith (I Thessalonians 3:2). He instructed Titus to teach older men to be sound in faith (2:2).

The same emphasis was made at various times by Martin Luther in discussing the aim of preaching and teaching. On occasion, he exhorted that when we teach, we are to teach faith.² Of course, no one can give faith to another person. Faith is solely a gift of God's grace implanted by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. However, after observing that Paul in Romans first taught faith, Luther pointed out that teaching and preaching are to teach faith and the Word of God against human law and superstition.³ When faith collapses, love grows cold, God's Word is neglected, and sin controls.⁴ When faith cements an individual to Jesus Christ, it is then that spiritual sight and knowledge of the truth follow.⁵ He added that when faith is recognized as consisting of sheer trust in God's grace, it is not surprising that

children are better informed in faith than adults, for they believe very simply and without any question in a gracious God.⁶

A faith maturity perspective as the aim of congregational life and teaching provides a corrective for both practitioners and theorists. This perspective asserts that teaching and learning involve much more than memorizing Bible passages, knowing "right answers," restating catechetical truths, explaining Biblical concepts, and describing a time-line of Biblical events. In a faith maturity perspective, such goals serve a larger purpose, that of growing in faith.

The faith maturity perspective of ECE suggests that growth is more than advancing through developmental stages, such as Fowler's faith development paradigm or Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive objectives. While such models can be helpful in identifying facets of faith, such as levels of faith seeking understanding and processing information, the faith maturity perspective of ECE provides a more comprehensive view of faith than hierarchical models of development.

That the faith of youth and adults can be assessed in an empirical study may be surprising. The inability to assess faith as trust was recognized by the researchers in their development of "The Mature Faith Index" which focuses on two aspects: 1. indicators of a mature Christian faith, such as acceptance of both the divinity and humanity of Jesus; 2. responses by individuals as to how true such faith indicators are for them on a seven-point scale ("never true" to "always true"). Focusing on indicators of faith and self-reports is a significant step in assessing faith maturity.⁷

One finding related to the faith maturity of youth and adults reported by ECE that may disturb or even shock is the number of Lutherans in the study who have difficulty in accepting salvation as a gift of God's grace rather than being earned by good works. The finding that 60 percent of the adults and 47 percent of the youth of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) agreed with the statement, "I believe I must obey God's rules and commandments in order to be saved," reminds one of an earlier study that asked a similar question of an LCMS sample. In that study, 44 percent of the members of the LCMS agreed with the statement, "The main emphasis of the Gospel is on God's rules for right living."⁸ With justification by grace through faith being the article of faith upon which the church stands or falls, a good works orientation expressed by a significant number of members is a clarion call to examine both the content and process of the church's communication of the one Gospel.⁹

A study of the faith maturity of adults and youth would enable one to learn more about two dimensions of faith investigated in ECE, the vertical (having a deep, personal relationship with a loving God), and the horizontal (translating this personal relationship into acts of love, mercy, and justice). One could discover the extent to which members of congregations reflect a

faith with a strong horizontal but weak vertical dimension, for example. One could identify the level of interest in reaching out to others beyond the congregation, especially various ethnic groups, as well as the level of joy in worship. If responses reflecting these two dimensions of faith of members of the LCMS were similar to the responses of the Lutheran sample of ECE, think of the efforts that could be directed to the following behaviors.¹⁰

ADULT AND YOUTH BEHAVIORS		
Item	% Adults	% Youth
1. Never or rarely encouraged someone to believe in Jesus Christ	68	80
2. Do not engage in daily prayer	62	71
3. Do not read the Bible when alone	75	91
4. Never donated time to helping the poor, hungry, sick or those unable to help themselves	56	60

An investigation of the faith maturity of youth and adults can reinforce the suggestion that the most problematic areas in the lives of many congregational members today center in spiritual growth (prayer and Bible reading), talking with others about one's faith, involvement in service, and the pursuit of justice.¹¹ An urgency to attend to the basics of congregational life also can be stimulated by the findings of the ECE study which identified the percentages of various groups which expressed an integrated faith (a faith that reflects both vertical and horizontal dimensions).¹²

INTEGRATED FAITH	
Group	Percentage
Adults	24
Youth	9
Pastors	67
Christian Education Coordinators (lay supervisors of CE)	35
Lay Teachers	32

On the basis of these and other findings, the study noted a pattern in which faith is only partially experienced or lived out, with the faith of many being "on hold," restricted, and even dormant.¹³ One implication cited is that **a major concern for the church is to find means of igniting and nurturing a more viable and vigorous faith among its members.**¹⁴ As the study suggested, a likely factor accounting for this

need is a large number of adults and youth who evidence difficulty in accepting salvation as a gift rather than something earned.

A special challenge identified in the study is the small number of men who evidenced an integrated faith. In the Protestant sample, 13 percent of the male population, ages 20-39, and 15 percent of the same population, ages 40-59, expressed an integrated faith.¹⁵ The bright spots in the study were the numbers of women and older people who reflected an integrated faith. Forty percent of the women, ages 40-59, revealed an integrated faith, as did 49 percent of the women, age 60 or older, and 35 percent of the men of the same age group. Whether such faith maturity is due to developmental or generational differences is not clear and deserves investigation. What is clear in the ECE study is the presence of two groups in the church with significant faith resources to share, middle-age women and older men and women.

A study of the faith maturity of youth also can help us to respond more adequately to the crises facing young people today seen in a sample of behaviors reported by Lutheran youth in the ECE study.¹⁶

AT-RISK BEHAVIORS

Behaviors	% Who Reported Such Behaviors
1. Alcohol use: 6 or more times in the last 12 months	54
2. Binge drinking: had 5 or more drinks in a row 3 or more times in the last 12 months	41
3. Marijuana: used marijuana once or more in the last 12 months	20
4. Suicide: thought about committing suicide once or more in the last 12 months	51
5. Sexual intercourse: have had sexual intercourse once or more during lifetime	40

Since the 1960's, evidence presented by researchers and casual observations have pointed to the need for direct, explicit moral instruction by families and congregations. Perhaps a study of the moral values and behaviors of our own constituency would heighten the urgency of providing moral instruction among adults and youth. In a previous national study, 70 percent of the 10,467 parents included in the study indicated that they are "very" or "quite" interested in programs that would equip them for the task of instilling moral beliefs in their children.¹⁷

The Power of Christian Education

Four findings of the ECE study which underscore the power of Christian education experiences in the family and congregation deserve special attention.

1. Among adults, the two strongest factors that relate to faith maturity are lifetime involvement in church education and lifetime church involvement.

2. Among youth, the two factors that relate strongest to faith maturity are lifetime involvement in Christian education and the degree of spiritual life in the family.

3. The greater the quality of Christian education, the more members reported growth in faith and loyalty to one's denomination.

4. The way in which Christian education is done matters as much as, if not more than, any other area of congregational life.¹⁸

When the study accents the power of Christian education in the faith development of youth and adults, it is important to remember the link between teaching and every ministry of the church. Instead of conceptualizing Christian education in a solo role, the report identified connections between Christian education and worship, the church as a community, outreach, and service. Faith active in love is expressed in the "doing" of worship, community building, outreach, and service and is empowered to act through teaching. Thus, Christian education finds itself in a servant role through which one is equipped to engage in meaningful forms of Christian ministry. The unique role of teaching in a congregation is that of a key change agent which has a direct bearing on every facet of church ministry.

The ECE study also reminds us of the impact of informal teaching/learning experiences in congregations. Interacting with others in informal settings, participating in service projects, engaging in worship, being involved in witness and evangelism, giving and receiving care, belonging to small groups in a congregation, and living as a family are powerful learning experiences. Informal ways of learning that are intentional, such as personal Bible study or individual learning projects, can lead to significant growth, especially in a society in which large numbers of adults and youth pursue learning as an essential component of their lives.

That change and growth occur through formal and informal teaching is evident when viewed from several perspectives. The New Testament portrays the early church as a teaching community. While there is no one extended discussion of the role of a teacher in the New Testament, teachers and teaching permeate the gospels and epistles. A frequently cited title given to Jesus was that of teacher. Paul in his epistles constantly responded to critical problems of belief and morality through teaching. Peter presented a rationale for teaching in his second epistle. As a community which gathered for worship in response to the Gospel, the early Christians engaged in service within and outside their community, evangelized outsiders, and invested enormous energy in teaching as a vehicle for change.

An Agenda for Congregations

That teaching was taken seriously by the laity is seen in the suggestion that every Christian, whether an incapacitated beggar, prosperous merchant, mother, father, or grandparent, saw one's self as a teacher in particular contexts. What one had experienced as a Christian needed to be taught.

A historical perspective also reveals that the Lutheran Church, born in a university context, focused on teaching as a way of communicating the Word to children and adults. The founders of the LCMS identified the family, school, and congregation as the most significant shapers of faith. In helping individuals to develop competencies as pastors and educators, the LCMS has placed a high value upon seminaries, colleges, and universities as learning communities. Theological, historical, psychological, and educational perspectives of teaching provide the foundation for interpreting the finding of the ECE study **that effective Christian education is the most powerful single influence congregations have on maturity of faith.**¹⁹

A challenge to congregations today is the report's finding **that many of the factors needed for effectiveness in Christian education are not currently operating in large numbers of congregations.**²⁰ This finding can motivate congregational leaders to ask:

1. How many baptized children are involved in a comprehensive program of Christian education? How can this number be increased?
2. How many families are being equipped to function as skilled nurturers and teachers of faith? How can we better equip families in this role?
3. How many youth who have confessed faith in the rite of confirmation continue to be involved in Christian education? How can we help young people to grow in faith?
4. How many adults in a congregation are visibly involved in study, teaching, and learning? What will motivate adults to seize opportunities for growth?
5. To what extent are the curricula of professional church workers providing a solid foundation in the theory and practice of teaching/learning? How can ministers of the Word be better equipped as teachers?
6. How much time, energy, and resources are invested by congregations in Christian education experiences for all age groups? How can we help more members to see the relationship between this investment and their growth?
7. To what extent is the role of Christian education in a congregation and its interrelationship to all other ministries of the church being interpreted to and by members? How can members be helped to develop a vision based on Matthew 28:18-20?

Individual and congregational study of the ECE report can serve as the basis for the development of educational ministry. For example, attention could be given to eight factors associated with the effectiveness of Christian education in the faith maturity of youth and adults.²¹

1. Teachers who reflect a high level of maturity in faith as well as a clear understanding of educational theory and practice.
2. Pastors whose commitment to Christian education is seen in investing significant hours in the Christian education programs of both adults and youth and is based on a clear understanding of educational theory and practice.
3. A high level of involvement of both adults and youth in the Christian education programs of a congregation.
4. A clear mission statement identifying the chief aim of Christian education and its interrelationship with other ministries of the church, as well as stated learning objectives for all age groups.
5. Identification of the educational content of a congregation's educational program that emphasizes (in any order):
 - a. Biblical knowledge and understanding;
 - b. values and moral decision-making;
 - c. a multicultural awareness and commitment;
 - d. a global awareness and understanding of significant issues;
 - e. education about human sexuality;
 - f. the use/abuse of chemicals (alcohol and other drugs);
 - g. involvement in service and responsibility for poverty and hunger;
 - h. core theological concepts and doctrines;
 - i. being a friend, making friends, and showing concern for others.(The list can be expanded by considering the functions of a congregation.)
6. A high level of parent involvement in youth ministry planning and decision-making.
7. A grasp of the educational process that focuses on:
 - a. relating one's faith to daily decisions and economic, social, and political issues;
 - b. life experiences as occasions for developing spiritual insight (relate Word and world);
 - c. the development of a sense of community in which learners help each other grow in faith and life;
 - d. the faith journey of each individual which includes a lifelong perspective of aging;

- e. intergenerational contacts and experiences that enable several generations to serve and learn from one another;
 - f. an encouragement of individual thinking and questioning in a climate of trust;
8. A recognition that small congregations guided by skilled leaders can educate as effectively as large congregations.

The ECE report easily can provide congregational leaders with educational agendas for the 1990's. Here is a sample list of possibilities:

1. Building on the strengths of congregations is a place to begin.
 - a. There is a solid core of youth and adults who confess faith in a loving and forgiving God as well as the Holy Spirit who is at work in their lives.
 - b. The great majority of adults and youth see their congregations as the greatest influence in their spiritual growth as well as the chief influence on their moral decision-making.
 - c. With increasing age, there is a growing awareness among adults of the significance of faith and the need to be involved in meaningful service.
 - d. There is an openness to ministry on the part of millions that is the result of hurts and stresses in their lives, such as job loss, family concerns, personal anxieties, a search for meaning, and a need for personal affirmation.
2. Helping youth and adults to "live in the Word" is a high priority. The top interests of adults in the ECE study center in their spiritual lives and in learning more about the Bible. In the ELCA sample, nearly 70 percent of the adults said that they were interested or very interested in studying the Bible, developing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, applying their faith to daily living, and learning about how Christians make moral decisions.
3. Educating congregational members to articulate in their own words a vision of the mission of the church, their ministry, and the role of Christian education and its interrelationship with other ministries of the church.
4. Developing a rationale for continuing growth in faith throughout the lifespan that will recognize unique opportunities for faith development in each stage of life.
5. Stimulating a change in mindset which sees involvement in Bible study, not as an extracurricular activity, but as a strategic means of personal and community growth as well as outreach among relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and the larger community.

6. Revisioning confirmation ministry and dealing with the huge numbers of young people who are "falling off the mountain" (at times, 40 percent of those baptized drop out by age 13; 50 percent of those who confirm their faith are inactive by their senior year in high school).

7. Developing lay educational teachers and leaders in congregations. Would it not be wonderful, for example, if church leaders would develop a "Youth Specialties" style of youth seminar for leaders that would integrate the design of this seminar **and** a Lutheran perspective on the Bible and faith maturity.

8. Promoting the mission and development of Lutheran elementary and secondary schools. Though ECE did not include any sample of day school students, the thrust of the entire report reflects what Lutheran schools are about: faithful teachers, learning communities, Bible study, relating the Word to everyday living, involvement in service and outreach, linkage with families, and equipping for service.

9. Coordinating the support and growth of Christian education through research and development. In a research vacuum, there is the possibility to become "borrowers and imitators" of programs which may not complement a church body's theological assumptions and principles. Research, such as the ECE study, can help a church to build on its theological foundations, identify significant needs and trends, and reduce the time lag between recognition of a need and the development of resources.

10. Networking that identifies a reservoir of gifted lay and professional educational leaders. Important are an identification of competent personnel, the matching of resource personnel and congregational needs, and evaluation.

11. Focusing on programming rather than programs. A Christian education program that relates to the unique characteristics and needs of members is best developed by each congregation.

12. Developing a thinking climate in congregations and recognizing the limitations of engaging in only "direct teaching." While input from teachers is vital, time and opportunity for individuals to consider, reflect, sort through, and integrate content in the context of a sup-

RENEWING THE FAMILY SPIRIT: OVERCOMING CONFLICT TO ENJOY STRONGER FAMILY TIES by David J. Ludwig. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray that God would "deliver us from evil," and we acknowledge also that His "is the kingdom and the power and the glory." This book is an excellent example of what these petitions mean for marriage and the family.

The author, Dr. David J. Ludwig—pastor, educator, and clinical psychologist—takes seriously the powerful forces of spiritual reality—both good and evil. He clearly describes how these spiritual forces affect the individual and the "shared spirit" of marriage and family relationships. He demonstrates how the Holy Spirit works to enliven, unite, build-up and daily renew God's people as they are in Christ and in the sacred relationship of marriage and family. He delineates how Satan works hard to weaken and, if allowed, to eventually destroy family ties. How can the family daily be renewed? How can the family resist and overcome the destructive forces so prevalent in our society today? What's the formula? Formula? Not formula, but the Word, the Gospel of Christ! There's the spiritual power. This book shows us how it works.

There is excellent and clever use of analogy and examples with which the reader will readily identify. The book is meaningful and relevant because one can clearly see one's own experience as a married person or family member—both the negatives and the positives. Using weather patterns as an analogy, he writes about the "atmospheric conditions within the family," and he compares family turbulence with "high and low-pressure systems." He ably and accurately applies Holy Scripture as he addresses the various and changing weather patterns of family life.

As a prelude to each chapter, the reader is presented briefly with a number of Bible passages and questions apropos to the subject matter of the chapter. One readily develops a mind-set for the discussion which follows. At the end of each chapter there are "Weather Watch Activities." Each of the exercises may be done individually or in a group setting. The activities are most helpful and worth taking the time to work through. The notes at the end of each chapter are also worth reading.

Recently, Concordia Publishing House has been producing some excellent materials for the church on family life. Both *Renewing the Family Spirit* and the video course bearing the same title are substantive and relevant, and will assist all of us in the church to understand the proper distinction between Law and Gospel as it applies to family life, and to live the Gospel in our life together as family and the family of God.

Glenn C. Einspahr
Professor of Education
Concordia College—Seward

Paul Vasconcellos
Professor of Theology
Concordia College—Seward

FIVE CRIES OF YOUTH by Merton P. Strommen. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.

Much food for thought! Those are the first words that come to mind after reading this revised edition about high school youth. Anyone with a palate for reading research with a solid statistical base will find this book a gourmet's delight.

Strommen makes many comparisons to the original study as well as a ten-year comparison from other studies. He renders conclusions based on data collected from 20,000 young people and from several other national studies on youth. The random, national sample for this study was drawn from high school youth in the American Baptist, Roman Catholic, United Methodist, Southern Baptist, Young Life, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Church of Christ, Evangelical Covenant and Episcopal churches. A banquet for the serious reader!

People who study the future often suggest that the only thing constant in life is change. This study asserts that little change has taken place since the original 1970 study. The *Five Cries* are essentially the same: the Cry of Self-Hatred, the Cry of Psychological Orphans, the Cry of Social Concern, the Cry of the Prejudiced, and the Cry of the Joyous. The one major change, to be true to the futurist, was the Cry of Protest in the original data and book.

The Cries of Self-Hatred and Joy remain the dominant cries of today's youth. The first cry is one of alienation from self, others and God. The fifth cry, the Cry of the Joyous, is one of identification with God, His people, and their way of life.

Strommen attempts to identify the attitudes, beliefs and values of the sample population as they relate to the *Five Cries*. The book is primarily aimed at parents and youth group leaders or whoever wants to reach out to youth and needs to understand the loneliness that often characterizes the psychological orphan, the angry humanist, the unreflective bigot, and even the committed Christian. While the style of writing does suggest that one needs to know how to read and understand social science research to gain the most from the book, the author does offer many suggestions as to how youth leaders and parents can reach out to our church youth.

The good news in the study is that church youth are different in their orientation to life and in their values in a positive manner. This is a diet many youth leaders and parents need to hear, reminding all of us that the Gospel impacts lives in major ways.

Jim Koerschen
Dean of Students
Concordia College—Seward

⁴Martin Luther, *The Christian in Society I*, edited by James Atkinson, in *LUTHER'S WORKS* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 44:70.

⁵Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 14–16*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, in *LUTHER'S WORKS* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 24:33.

⁶Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, edited by Theodore Tappert, in *LUTHER'S WORKS* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 54:335.

⁷A review of the 38 items of "The Mature Faith Index" prior to use is suggested.

⁸O'Hara, 9.

⁹What is the problem? Is a large number of church members who still live under the Law merely a reflection of the centuries-old struggle between grace and merit? Or is the problem related to a lack of communicating the Gospel? A Lutheran pastor, after an extensive tour of the Midwest and West which included attending worship services in congregations representing every branch of American Lutheranism, observed that the most missing element was the Gospel. Wudy, Robert. "Where Is The Gospel?" *LUTHERAN WITNESS* (April, 1989), 21.

¹⁰Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations" (A Report for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1990, 26.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 22.

¹²Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations" (A Six-Denomination Report). Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1990, 25.

¹³Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations" (A Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty, and Congregational Life). Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1990, 13.

¹⁴Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations" (A Report for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), 22.

¹⁵Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations" (A Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty, and Congregational Life), 18.

¹⁶Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations" (A Report for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), 33.

¹⁷Strommen, Merton & Strommen, A. Irene. *FIVE CRIES OF PAR-ENTS*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985, 116.

¹⁸Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations" (A Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty, and Congregational Life), 39, 40, 42, 55.

¹⁹Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations" (A Six-Denomination Report), 51.

²⁰Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations" (A Report for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), 57.

²¹*Ibid.*, 55, 56.

²²THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, September 7, 1990.

portive environment are needed if learning is to result in insight and commitment.

13. Providing for continuing education of called ministers of the Word is underscored by data in the study. Significant restructuring of Christian education in congregations is related directly to the quality and continuing growth of its leadership. The challenge centers in the delivery of educational resources that await being tapped.

14. Finding ways to stimulate the excitement levels of lay teachers is needed. Here is a starter list of ways to heighten teacher motivation.

- Regular (monthly), constructive affirmation of the quality and major contribution of their ministries.
- A sharing time by teachers after Bible classes when contact is fresh.
- Support groups and a resource center for teachers of all age levels.

15. Equipping Christian educators who focus on adult and family ministry is urgent. As the National Commission on Children recently pointed out, the recurring topics of alcohol, drugs, premature sex, and juvenile crime reveal a breadth and depth and complexity that defy simple solutions. The Commission then added that constructive efforts must focus on individual family responsibility and the physical and spiritual well-being of children (and adults, we may add).²²

As the authors of the ECE report noted, the health and vitality of many congregations today are on the line. The quality of congregational responses to the challenges of the 1990's will impact several generations. Congregations which focus on faith maturity as an aim, the power of Christian education to stimulate growth in faith, and the development of their educational agendas will shift attention away from worrying about growing, declining, or plateauing to involvement in a ministry of the Gospel. When the Gospel addresses significant people needs, its power to work can be trusted.

Notes

¹For example, a study which found important differences between Missouri Synod and members of other Lutheran bodies in three areas—doctrinal beliefs, the role/status of women, and the support of Lutheran radio/TV ministries—identified many similarities, leading to the conclusion that "to a remarkable degree, Missouri Synod Lutherans are much like their fellow Lutherans." O'Hara, John, "Profiles of Lutherans, 1980: Preliminary Comparisons Between the LCMS and Total Lutheran Samples." Unpublished paper, 1981,2.

²Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians—1535*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, in *LUTHER'S WORKS* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 27:54.

³Martin Luther, *Church and Ministry I*, edited by Eric Gritsch, in *LUTHER'S WORKS* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 39:214.

Continued from page 16

for other denominations. In 1989-1990, Search Institute repeated the study for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, expanding it to include investigation of the role of families and church-related schools in promoting faith maturity and loyalty. Adventist leaders are now in the process of using the study findings to build greater effectiveness in all three sectors: family, congregation, and school. It is interesting to note that the congregational factors promoting faith maturity are the same in the Adventist Church as in the mainline denominations. This Adventist project, which flies under the banner of *Valuegenesis*, is particularly applicable to The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod due to the significant energy invested in the development and maintenance of a private school system.

In sum, the findings from *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations* provide new understandings of the beliefs, attitudes, and interests of a large, nationally representative sample of adults and adolescents. Attitudes toward, and evaluations and descriptions of their congregational and other life experience give additional new insights on what matters in promoting faith maturity. And the need to take Christian education seriously is thereby documented.

These new learnings can begin a revitalization of congregations throughout the country, regardless of denomination, for they can give focus to successful reform.

Search Institute has developed several resources that help describe and interpret the results of the study. In addition to the two major reports issued in March (Project Summary and Individual Denominational Reports), three self-study guides are available. The first two—adult and youth—are based on the 38-state index of faith maturity developed for the research project. They provide a way for groups of adults or youth to respond to the statements (each of which is related to the eight core dimensions of faith), assess that response in terms of the study findings, reflect on the eight dimensions of a maturing faith that the statements represent, and discuss implications for their own lives. The third self-study guide is a checklist for use by Christian education leaders in the congregation. It names and describes the characteristics of an effective program and guides the users through an assessment of these factors within the particular congregational setting. A four-part video series discussing and interpreting project findings is also available. It is designed to be used in adult education forums, church council retreats, and education committee planning processes.



Project reports and other resources described in this article are available from Search Institute, 122 West Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55404. (1-800-888-7828).

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